Errant U.S. Diplomat Upsets Agnew

By Jack Anderson

The raucous misbehavior of a top American diplomat during Vice President Agnew's recent visit to Kenya has created a behind-the-scenes uproar that has reached Washington's highest levels.

The errant diplomat is AID administrator in Kenya, Bert M. Tollefson, Jr., 41, an ex-corn lobbyist and Republican politico from South Dakota. His antics are colorfully detailed in a series of confidential State Department telegrams.

The American Ambassador to Kenya, Robinson McIlvaine, was so outraged that he fired off the blistering "eyes only" wires to Tollefson's boss, John A. Hannah, head of the Agency for International Development. We have obtained copies of McIlvaine's missives.

"I regret to inform you," McIlvaine wrote in one cable, "that Bert Tollefson blotted his copy book (diplomatic jargon for 'fouled up') so badly during the Vice President's visit as to raise serious question as to his suitablility for service abroad. Indeed, you may be hearing from the Vice President directly on the matter.

"The problem started with Bert's well-known pushiness and general lack of sensitivity and culminated in his getting sloshed at Treetops (a fancy lodge on the edge of the jungle), making passes at the Vice President's secretary and trying to drag her down the steps to meet an elephant at ground level . . . ."

The sequence of events that led up to this drunken climax, wrote McIlvaine, began when Tollefson was officially informed that "no Americans were invited to join the Vice President's group at Treetops. (Tollefson) came anyhow on his own and canvassed Kenyans for a bed in one of their rooms. In the end he talked someone out of a room to himself . . . ."

In the course of the evening, McIlvaine related, Tollefson "repeatedly interrupted" Kenyan officials who "were explaining animals" to the Vice President. "The owner of Treetops," the Ambassador wrote, "at one point asked me, 'Who is that jackass?!—pointing to Bert.

"The incident with the Vice President's secretary," continued McIlvaine, "took place in the small hours of the morning. According to her it took all her strength to get away from him."

Even Kenyan Ambassador to the U.S. Leonard Kibinge, who was there, commented on Tollefson's "condition," McIlvaine said.

"The next morning, Bert slept through the departure at 0900 and when he did awake took the remaining Secret Service car to Nyeri leaving them stranded and furious . . . A car had to be sent the 100 miles up to Nyeri to bring Bert back."

The whole affair, McIlvaine concluded, had substantiated his misgivings about Tollefson's performance during his three months as head of the AID program in Kenya.

"Prior to bringing out his family I developed serious questions about his judgment. He reinforced this impression by sending me a telegram from Washington . . . implying that the Vice President wanted him to co-host the reception we were giving in the Vice President's honor. Naturally I checked this with the Vice President and he was incredulous.

"I can, of course, live with the situation but will have to spend a lot of time riding herd and wonder whether all that effort is warranted in support of 'Peter's Principle.' " (The Peter Principle is a tongue-in-cheek theory which holds that everyone eventually rises to his own level of incompetence.)

When asked about the incident, AID Administrator Hannah refused comment except to call Tollefson "a very respectable fellow" and to inquire where we obtained the confidential cables.

Ambassador McIlvaine's eyewitness account, Hannah maintained, was only an "allegation." Hannah had dispatched Tollefson to London, he said, to discuss the matter with Samuel Adams, AID's African Administrator—a fact which is confirmed by a subsequent telegram we have obtained.

Reached in Nairobi, Tollefson denied the Ambassador's charges and said they were based on a complete misunderstanding.

Assassination

A new and far fetched theory of the assassinations of President Kennedy, Sen. Robert Kennedy, Dr. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X is circulating on Capitol Hill. It is contained in a 14-page report buttressed by various documents, which was put together by Don Riley, a labor union employee and assassination buff from San Francisco.

Its conclusion is that all four were killed by the same "conspirators": CIA agents, anti-Castro Cubans, some Dallas police, FBI operatives, "States Righters," Nazis, a "clique of very conservative businessmen (mostly oil)" and rightwing religious leaders. We have criticized every one of these groups at one time or another.

But our own investigations convince us that the new "theory," as earnest and ingenious as it may be, is pure balderdash.

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